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Editor Was Godfather Of Neoconservatism

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Irving Kristol, 89, a forceful essayist, editor and university professor who became the leading architect of neoconservatism, which he called a political and intellectual movement for disaffected ex-liberals, like himself, who had been "mugged by reality," died Friday at Capital Hospice in Arlington County.

Mr. Kristol spent much of his career in New York but had for the past two decades lived at the Watergate apartment complex in the District. He died of complications from lung cancer, said his son, William Kristol, founder and editor of the conservative Weekly Standard magazine.

The elder Kristol founded and edited magazines such as Encounter and the Public Interest, which aimed at an elite audience of political, social and cultural tastemakers. In addition to his professorship at New York University, he advanced his ideas through monthly opinion pieces in the Wall Street Journal and a fellowship at the American Enterprise Institute think tank. He was also an editor of Basic Books, a small but distinguished publisher of social science and philosophy.

Karl Rove, a Republican strategist who advised President George W. Bush, called Mr. Kristol an "intellectual entrepreneur who helped energize several generations of public policy thinkers."

Through editing, writing and speaking, Mr. Kristol "made it a moral imperative to rouse conservatism from mainstream Chamber of Commerce boosterism to a deep immersion in ideas," Rove said. He also said that Mr. Kristol helped create a synthesis of Cold War Democrats and Ronald Reagan White House anticommunist hawks that influenced foreign and military policy in the 1980s.

Mr. Kristol and his wife, the Victorian-era historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, along with a group of sociologists, historians and academics, including Norman Podhoretz, Nathan Glazer, Richard Pipes and, for a while, Daniel P. Moynihan, emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as prominent critics of welfare programs, racial preferences, tax policy, moral relativism and countercultural social upheavals that they thought were contributing to America's cultural and social decay.

Mr. Kristol's father was an immigrant garment worker from Eastern Europe whose son grew up under humble circumstances, which shaped his beliefs. "Those who have been raised in poor neighborhoods -- the Daniel Patrick Moynihans, Edward Banfields, Nathan Glazers -- tend to be tough-minded about slums and their inhabitants," Mr. Kristol told the New York Times.

Middle-class sociologists, he said, "are certain that a juvenile delinquent from a welfare family is a far more interesting figure -- with a greater potentiality for redeeming not only himself but all of us -- than an ordinary, law-abiding and conforming youngster who is from the very same household."

Mr. Kristol had grown dismayed by the fragmentation of the Democratic Party over the war in Southeast Asia and remained a vigorous defender of a strong military to combat Communist threats. He championed a steady focus on economic growth that gives "modern democracies their legitimacy and durability" but cautioned against running deficits. He popularized supply-side economics, long considered a fringe belief that tax cuts would lead to widespread financial prosperity.

Mr. Kristol and many of his followers were dubbed neoconservatives. It was a term introduced by social critic Michael Harrington to describe the rightward turn of onetime liberals such as Mr. Kristol, whose extraordinary

political odyssey had taken him from Depression-era socialist to anticommunist Cold Warrior and Vietnam War hawk.

Although Harrington's use of the term neoconservative was not intended as a compliment, Mr. Kristol embraced the name and became its widely accepted godfather. An Esquire magazine cover story on him in 1979 helped legitimize Mr. Kristol as the leader of a full-fledged movement, even as he downplayed the idea that such a formal faction existed.

"We are not a movement," he once said. "There has never been a meeting of neoconservatives." Instead, he called it an "intellectual current" that came to prominence after a "gradual evolution."

Mr. Kristol found his public profile raised greatly by the Reagan presidency, when many neoconservatives, such as Paul Wolfowitz, William Bennett, Richard Perle and Elliott Abrams, started occupying administration jobs and found themselves in positions of influence over domestic, diplomatic and defense policy.

Neoconservatism also formed the core beliefs of many advisers to President George W. Bush, who gave Mr. Kristol the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, for helping set "the intellectual groundwork for the renaissance of conservative ideas in the last half of the 20th century."

Cultural and intellectual historian Paul S. Boyer of the University of Wisconsin called Mr. Kristol "one of those who helped make conservatism intellectually respectable" in the 1960s when New Deal liberalism was still a dominant political philosophy.

In the late 1960s, Mr. Kristol helped form a conservative philosophy that advocated moderation against what he viewed as the excesses of the far right and far left. He wrote that "the historical task and political purpose of neoconservatism would seem to be this: to convert the Republican party, and American conservatism in general, against their respective wills, into a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing a modern democracy. It is hopeful, not lugubrious; forward-looking, not nostalgic; and its general tone is cheerful, not grim or dyspeptic."

Jacob Heilbrunn, author of "They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons," said Mr. Kristol's thinking "played a big role in reshaping the Republican Party."

"He told traditional conservatives 'you need to accept New Deal and accept the achievements of liberalism,' " Heilbrunn said. "You don't try to roll it back but stop it from expanding further."

Mr. Kristol made a distinction between programs such as Social Security and Medicare, which collectively benefit society, and specific programs to help the poor, which he thought inflamed class resentment. He said that many Great Society programs of the 1960s came too close to a form of income redistribution anathema to capitalism. He also denounced public-interest lawyers and environmentalists as malevolent forces in American society.

Irving William Kristol was born Jan. 22, 1920, in Brooklyn, N.Y., and attended City College of New York because of its free tuition. His classmates at a school dubbed a "Jewish proletarian Harvard" included many who would become the leading intellectuals of their generation, including sociologists Daniel Bell and Glazer and literary critic Irving Howe.

They were featured in Joseph Dorman's 1998 acclaimed documentary, "Arguing the World," which detailed their ideological awakening and growth over the decades. Howe, who remained a social democrat and became an adversary of Mr. Kristol's, once said he "recruited" Mr. Kristol to the Young People's Socialist League.

Mr. Kristol allied himself with an anti-Stalinist wing of the group, and he blanched at party restrictions against reading anything other than prescribed doctrine. His Army service during World War II after graduation in 1940 brought him greater skepticism about the practicality of the radical left and its utopian view of the brotherhood of

man. He wrote of meeting fellow soldiers who "were too easily inclined to loot, to rape, and to shoot prisoners of war" and whose anti-Semitism was flagrant.

In 1942, Mr. Kristol married Himmelfarb, whom he met at a Socialist League meeting. She survives, along with their two children, William Kristol of McLean and Elizabeth Nelson of Charlottesville; and five grandchildren.

After World War II, Mr. Kristol became managing editor of Commentary magazine and wrote one of his most provocative essays, " 'Civil Liberties,' 1952 -- A Study in Confusion," which said liberals were wrong to stand in the way of every internal security hearing or effort by Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) to find Communist subversion in government and Hollywood.

"For there is one thing that the American people know about Senator McCarthy; he, like them, is unequivocally anti-Communist," he wrote. "About the spokesmen for American liberalism, they feel they know no such thing."

Mr. Kristol said he went to London to escape the uproar over the piece, and while there, he helped start the magazine Encounter with poet Stephen Spender in 1952. Mr. Kristol remained with the magazine for five years, and it attracted cultural and political analysis by such contributors as George F. Kennan, Isaiah Berlin and Vladimir Nabokov.

It was publicly revealed years after Mr. Kristol stepped down from the masthead that the CIA helped financially sustain Encounter. He told the Times he would not have taken the job if he had known about the CIA's underwriting, but he was not alarmed by the revelation.

In 1965, during the foment of the Vietnam War and the rise of the counterculture movement, Mr. Kristol and his old classmate Bell started the Public Interest. Bell left in the early 1970s after ideological clashes that culminated in Mr. Kristol's support for Richard M. Nixon while Bell supported Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.).

Despite Mr. Kristol's influence in public life, he kept a low profile. "People like Arthur Schlesinger go to 'in' restaurants, hang around with beautiful people," he once told The Washington Post. "I never do that. I stay home and watch TV. I like Westerns and cop shows. Nothing solemn or instructional."

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